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Lesu

PREFACE

LESU[1] is a village on the east coast of New Ireland about eighty miles from the northern end of the island. New Ireland is part of the Bismarck Archipelago and lies approximately between latitude 2° and 4° S. and longitude 150 and 153 E. It is in that part of the South Seas known ethnologically as Melanesia and is now under the political mandate of Australia. The island is long and narrow, about two hundred miles in length and an average width of twenty miles, except at its widest part in the extreme south, where it is approximately fifty miles across. It is divided into nine linguistic districts, in each one of which a different dialect is spoken. These dialects, while related, are not mutually intelligible. The linguistic unit in which I worked was comprised of five villages, Lesu, Ambwa, Langania, Libba, and Tandis, with a total population of about twelve hundred. It covered approximately twelve miles on the east coast north of the centre of New Ireland. I took up my residence in Lesu, which has a population of 232, and there did most of my work, although I visited other villages to attend various rites and secure ethnological information. Occasionally I went to a village in another linguistic district for some special ceremony, but such excursions were infrequent. I spent ten and a half months in Lesu, from March 1929 to February 1930.

When I first arrived, I found a partially completed and

[1] The spelling on Government maps and publications is Lossu. Lesu approximates more closely the phonetic pronunciation of the word by natives. New Ireland was formerly known as Neu Mecklenburg when it belonged to Germany.

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has its own life, so has each household. There is both a division and sharing of labour in the care of the children, in the gardening, in the cooking, and in all the activities which compose the fabric of daily life. The daily meeting of the family for its evening meal, the affection between them, and even their quarrels, all help to wield them into a close-knit unit.

The population of Lesu was 232, eleven of whom were absent working on coconut plantations. There were 66 households, in which lived 62 adult males, 63 adult females, 65 male children, 42 female children. The accompanying notes give the number now present in each household and not the number of children born in each family. Some of the children have died, others have married and formed households of their own, and others may be away. The average number of offspring per fruitful woman is 2·9.[1]

Kinship

MOIETY AND CLAN

Cutting across the local groupings are the lines of kinship. The society is divided into two exogamous moieties, *Telenga*, the fish hawk (*Pandion leucocephalus*, a marine bird which feeds on fish it catches in the shallow water of the reef), and *Kongkong*, the eagle (*Haliaëtus leucogaster*, a very large bird living in high trees, and which often feeds on marine animals which it sometimes obtains by chasing the *Telenga* and catching the food it drops). The members of each moiety regard themselves as related to each other in a classificatory manner. Each moiety is divided into a number of clans, an extended family group, all the members of

[1] For detailed information on birth and death rates see the author's article, "Vital Statistics of New Ireland (Bismarck Archipelago) as Revealed in Genealogies," *Human Biology*, September 1931, Vol. 3, No. 3.

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unit in which I lived and mostly from the village of Lesu. When the clan is foreign, that of a person from another linguistic unit who has married into this district, the fact is noted in parenthesis. A brief description of the totemic land and animal associated with each clan is also given when known. It is probable that in the past other clans, the members of which are now all dead, existed in this district. Because of the depopulation which has occurred, some clans now have only a very few members.

TELENGA (FISH HAWK) MOIETY

CLANS

Sinpop. Ground called Punbukua and located near the hamlet of Onel; animal, a pig named Tsinunas.

Sakwila. Ground named Belagila and about ten miles from Lesu; animal, a shark living in the water off the shore of Belagila.[1]

Pasabasaba. Ground is called by the same name, Pasabasaba, and consists of some rocks jutting part-way out into the water very close to the Belagila land of the Sakwila clan. Animal, a shark living in the water near by.[2]

Tsajil. Ground, a small section of the beach in the village of Langania and called by the clan name, Tsajil. No information about the animal.

Mala. Small part of beach near Pinakundo, about thirty miles from Lesu; two sharks named Lugadowai and Pamut.

Tujah. Stones jutting out into the water at the village of Langania called Kolabaruk; animal, a shark with the same name, Kolabaruk.

Palila. Ground, the small island of Jenusa close to the shore of Lesu. Tsenabonpil, the mythical culture heroine, is supposed to have lived on Jenusa and the hamlets directly opposite; animal, a pig.

[1] A plantation by the same name, Belagila, is on this land now.
[2] The name of this shark is not in my notes.

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Scattered along the coast between the villages are the coco-nut plantations owned and worked by Europeans. They also appear in the list above-mentioned in capital letters. 361

During the German régime, efforts to enumerate the natives living between Kavieng and Madina were still being made in 1901-1902, and in that year the Government called a meeting of tribes, who two years before were hostile, and induced them to select chiefs to assist in local administration. Sub-districts were delineated and an enumeration was made, 5,118 people being recorded between Kavieng and Lugagun. This number did not include the forest and mountain people, as it was intended later on to amalgamate these with the coastal groups. In 1906-1907, however, the successful organization of unions between the two stocks appears to have taken place. What is meant by this is not quite clear, but, from what I gathered during the inquiry, most of the mountain people were induced to build temporary villages on the coast, and fusion between the stocks was encouraged in every possible way. Certain villages on the coast now belong to mountain people, who live in them for short intervals, and almost everywhere more or less fusion between the two stocks has taken place. 659 619 [161]

A great civilizing factor in those days was the coastal road, which in 1902-3 was extended to Fisoa, and in 1903-4 had reached Pinigindu. During 1911-12 no effort was spared to make it suitable for motor traffic. After military occupation in 1914 this road was extended to Kimaden, and during the present civil administration it has been carried on as far as Karu. Its existence has had a tremendous influence on the development of the people of the district, by whose labour, of course, it has been built and kept in repair. 491

The people of the area investigated are divided linguistically into three main groups, two coastal languages, one extending from Kavieng to Fatmilak, and one from Fatmilak to Karu, and bush languages which appear in purest form in the Limalaua group of people who live in the bush and on the coast near Fatmilak. According to information received from natives, the Kavieng-Fatmilak language is divided into the following dialectical groups:— 197

Kavieng to Losuk.
Mangai to Livitua.
Laowan to Luburua.
Lakurumau (said to be different from the others).
Munawai to Fatmilak.

The languages from Fatmilak to Karu are grouped as follow:— Limalaua (a bush language) is said to extend to Yendat and possibly to Lemo, Bimun, Panaras, Patlinger and other villages to the west.

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As the population of these villages was apparently not enumerated until 1921, it is not possible to draw a comparative table covering the period between Hoffman's survey* and the present investigation. Hoffman's enumeration of the people between Kavcing and Tekirot for 1911, which included villages not within the area now recorded resulted in—

—	Adults.		Children.		Working Total.
1911.. ..	3,415	2,016	695	655	810
1912.. ..	3,418	2,020	697	669	1,147

The additional figures for 1912 do not indicate an increase in the population. They appear to represent mainly members of the community who were not counted in 1911.

The official figures taken during the Australian Administration are as follow:—

—	Adults.		Children.		Total.		Absent.	Grand Total.
	M.	F.	M.	F.	M.	F.		
1922–23 ..	4,020	2,407	911	1,066	4,931	3,473	..	8,404
1923–24.. ..	2,663	2,393	1,046	909	3,709	3,302	..	7,011
1924–25.. ..	2,684	2,379	1.137	957	3,821	3,336	..	7,157
1925–26.. ..	2,570	2.635	1,092	973	3,662	3,608	..	7,270
1927–28.. ..	2,398	2,530	1,157	1,047	3 555	3,577	..	7,132
1928–29.. ..	2,291	2,431	1,256	1,118	3,547	3,549	..	7,096
My enumeration (not including Bagail Village) ..	2,592	2,565	1,097	1,027	3,689	3,592	1,072 153	8,506

The above figures vary considerably, but to what extent these variations are due to fluctuations in the population it is not possible to say.

It has been shown that the population declined to an alarming extent during the last few years of German Administration. It is also probable that a considerable loss of life resulted from the famine of 1914. The epidemics of influenza that raged through the world during 1918 and the year following also took their toll of the district. There is every indication now, however, that in places the population of the east coast of New Ireland is beginning to hold its own, and, if people of the villages that are in need of special treatment can be induced to follow the advice of the Government in regard to plans especially designed for their benefit, conditions at present arresting their development should be removed and a healthier situation created. It must be remembered, however, that any programme for the improvement of the natives which threatens to change existing

*Dr. Hoffman; *Government Gazette*, German New Guinea, 1st June, 1913.

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161 conditions and demands the co-operation of the natives themselves will have many obstacles placed in its path, not the least of which will be a disheartening lack of interest on the part of the people whose improvement is sought.

FRUITLESS UNIONS.

163 Out of 3,073 unions investigated by me for the purpose of estimating issue and survival rates 835 or 27 per cent. were fruitless. When one goes into the reasons for fruitlessness, this figure is not so alarming as it at first appears. Of the fruitless unions, 228 or 27 per cent. are newly married, and likely to be productive within the next year or so. In 77 cases, or 9 per cent., the male partner is absent working and on return of the absentees the unions or at any rate a proportion of them may become fruitful. In 205 instances, or 24 per cent., either the male or the female partner is dead. Where the female has survived, a certain proportion may be expected to re-marry and of these some may possibly have issue. In 41 cases, or 5 per cent., the female, though married some time, is not looked upon by the other inhabitants of the village as being sterile; a certain proportion of these unions may also be expected to contribute issue. The balance of the fruitless unions 284, or 34 per cent., is regarded by the people as definitely sterile either through old age or on account of some physical disability.

FRUITFULNESS OF UNIONS.

The total issue is due therefore to 2,238 fruitful unions, which gives an average issue per fruitful union of 2.7, of whom 1.7 per union have survived. In working out the fruitfulness of the unions, I find that 690 have had an issue of 1 child each, 502 have had an issue of 2 children each, 389 have had an issue of 3 children each, 317 have had an issue of 4 children each, 182 have had an issue of 5 children each, 95 have had an issue of 6 children each, 32 have had an issue of 7 children each, 21 have had an issue of 8 children each, 6 have had an issue of 9 children each, and 4 have had an issue of 10 children each. There are considerable fluctuations in the issue and survival rates among the different villages. As a rule, the villages on the lower end of the road have small issues, high infant mortality and low survivals. In these villages I made special investigations, and found conditions of hardship consistent with the poverty in issue and survival. Certain villages in Kavieng itself also have a low survival rate, but here the issue rate is low, and the mortality rate not heavy.

INFANT MORTALITY.

165 According to the census, 19 per cent. of the children (6,096) of the unions (3,073) investigated, died during the period of lactation (2 years). This compares favorably with the figures resulting from an inquiry made by me some time ago in the Duke of York group.

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GENERAL.

114 161 In German times the declining condition of the population caused the Government considerable alarm. In the Annual Report for 1907-08 it is pointed out that "the native population of the Bismarck Archipelago is decreasing in parts so rapidly that the fact is recognizable even without exact statistical reports. The grounds for the decrease of the population have not been definitely discovered for any of the districts concerned. The following, however, come into consideration:—Migration, especially resulting from recruiting of labourers; disease, especially epidemics; sexual diseases and the consequent decrease of birth-rate; abortion, and artificially-produced sterility; unproductiveness in consequence of degeneration and inbreeding."

Again, in 1910-11, the Annual Report calls attention to the misfortune that there is still evidence of a rapid decrease in the population of the whole of New Ireland.

114 161 177 In July, 1912, Dr. Hoffmann conducted a medical survey embracing the population of Kaviang, and its surroundings as far down the east coast as the village of Pinigindu. In the report of this survey he states that the retrogression of the population is very alarming, and that, if it goes on, the extinction of the population is in sight. He points out that it was shocking during the inspection to find how many long-standing marriages were childless, and how small was the issue in the fruitful marriages investigated. Hoffmann draws special attention to the deleterious effects that a native population suffers through the contact with the higher European civilized population, pointing out that the conditions of native life are thereby almost completely altered, that old customs lose their foundations, and with the introduction of trade and progress a complete revolution sets in, which must unsettle the native mind. He says there is scarcely a district which has not experienced more or less interruptive changes. He considers that the native, who formerly had need of a rising generation capable of fighting, now no longer sees the necessity for a virile posterity whose working capabilities can only benefit the European. He points out that all these disadvantages work subconsciously in the native mind, without any ultimate advantage ever entering his head. The change, being too sudden, results first of all in a retrogression of the people who have more or less lapsed into *taedium vitae*. What then is required, he suggests, is making the transition easy to accustom people to new conditions, to strengthen them, to guard them from illness, to improve their general conditions of living and so bring them a fresh lease of life. He questions the possible success even of this, but states that it must be tried even at

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the risk of a large expenditure and the abandonment of less pressing tasks. The section ends with a statement that, without a population capable of working, New Guinea is practically useless as a tropical colony.

After going into the diseases indicated during his examination, and relating the toll they had taken on the population, he summarizes briefly the opinions formed by his examination, and then submits under three headings certain measures for the adjustment of the problem, the most important of which actually agrees with what is now being done by the New Guinea Public Health Organization.

PRESENT MEDICAL CONTROL.

The villages along the road and mountains are regularly patrolled by the medical staff at Kavieng. Some of the planters and the missionaries treat any sick natives that are brought to them, and in addition to this a native medical Tul-tul is stationed in nearly every village, with a stock of medicine which he has been trained to use.

SUGGESTIONS.

The regeneration of the population of the east coast of New Ireland is, apart from administrative reasons, of the greatest importance to every European residing in the district, and from what I have seen of the missionaries and planters they can be relied upon to play their part in any scheme with this end in view.

A large part of the district lies too far from Kavieng to be effectively controlled by the present medical organization; and the excellent medical patrol system, which is doing so much good in a general way for the native population cannot possibly be expected to cope with the special conditions that affect the issue and survival rates of the community. What is required, therefore, is an examination of the district by a qualified and experienced medical officer, with the object of submitting a report on the most practical way of dealing with the problem.

A second factor in the scheme of regeneration is to improve the general conditions of native life, and study carefully anything standing in the way of welfare with the object of introducing necessary changes.

The primary factor in this scheme is sympathetic and thorough local administration. The present system of village control by Luluais and Tul-tuls under the supervision of district officials is a step in the right direction, provided the natives appointed by the Government are men acceptable to the villagers themselves, and represent adequately the various social groups into which the people are divided. No scheme of local administration, however, can possibly function satisfactorily

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with inheritance of clan and property in the female line. There are therefore more practical reasons to remember females than males.

However, the sex ratios with their apparent inconsistencies are presented for what they are worth. There is no ambiguity about the fact that there is a higher masculinity at birth and at the time of reproduction for this particular group of a declining people.[22]

SUMMARY

The people on whom this study was made are generally considered to be a part of a group which is dying out. Pitt-Rivers says that, "Nowhere in the Pacific is the phenomenon of the disappearance of the aboriginal races more noticeable than in the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, where European control last made its influence felt."[23] The same author notes that the decline has been even more marked in New Ireland and New Hanover than on some of the other islands.[24] The population of the Kavieng district of New Ireland, which includes the larger part of the east coast, was counted as 14,749 in 1914 and as 13,289 in 1921, a difference of 1,460 in seven years.[25] There is another report which covers the period 1928-29.[26] Mission stations are responsible for the latter figures, which refer only to those sections under mission control, and can be used merely to indicate a general tendency. For the Kavieng district this report gives the decrease per 1,000 living, as 7.2; i. e., there was 7.2 more deaths than births per thousand in 1928-29. The same report gives the decrease for the whole Mandated Territory of New Guinea (excluding Aitape, Morobe and Salamaua) as 3 per thousand for 1928-29. While none of the figures are adequate, they are sufficient to indicate a declining population. The group on which

[22] Another study on a different primitive people has, however, revealed no excess of masculinity in the total population of a declining people. See Hogbin, H. I., The Problem of Depopulation in Melanesia as Applied to Ontong Java. *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 57.

[23] Pitt-Rivers, G. H. L. F.—The Clash of Culture, *London*, 1927, p. 20.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[25] *Ibid.*, Tables 1 and 2, given in Appendix VI, reproduced from Statistics relating to Commerce, Native Tax, Population, etc., in connection with the late German New Guinea Possessions, published by the Government of the Commonwealth of New Guinea.

[26] Anthropological Report, No. 6. Territory of New Guinea. Introduction. (In press.)

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the statistics in this paper are based is a small unit in this declining people.

By the use of the genealogical method in a study of 455 women, it was possible to compare one generation or age group with another. It was found that there has been an increase in deaths before marriage during the last three generations, and that this increase has taken place during infancy. Since the birth rate is small and not increasing, it is evident that these people must be declining in population.

To discover why more deaths are occurring in infancy is not easy. The causes of death are not known to the natives and there is no government station near enough for any autopsies to be made. All one can do in addition to presenting the factual material is to point out the nonexistence of certain causes and to posit, very tentatively, any possible ones. Such factors as feeding and the care of the infant may be ruled out. The infant receives the same care and the same food today that he did three generations ago. The fact that an infant only a few days old is given baked taro to eat happened also several generations ago. Also, there has been no change in the habits of work, or the manner of living in general, for the pregnant woman and for the mother while she is nursing her infant. At birth, there was in the past and still is today, a dependence on the skill of a few native women. The report of a conference called by the Commissioner for Native Affairs and attended by the Director of Public Health and by the representatives of Mission Stations in the Territory, seems to the writer to be quite erroneous in regard to the causes for an increase in infant mortality. The conference was of the opinion "that the high rate of infant mortality is due to:

(*a*) The too early marriage of many women.
(*b*) Undernourishment and improper feeding of infants.
(*c*) Undernourishment of people generally, due to an ill-balanced diet, and in some cases to food shortage.
(*d*) A lack of cleanliness on the part of those handling and feeding infants.
(*e*) Epidemics, e. g., whooping cough.
(*f*) Infanticide." [27]

It has already been shown that for the people on whom this study is made, the conditions indicated by a, b, c, d are exactly the same now as

[27] Report to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of the Territory of New Guinea, from July 1st, 1926 to the 30th of June, 1927, *Canberra*, p. 115.

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possible connection of syphilis with reducing the birth rate and increasing the number of deaths due to accidents of pregnancy has been noted. 164

The difficulty with most theories accounting for the decline in native populations is that there is very little factual material to prove them. But it would seem from statistics presented in this study made through genealogies, that one small group of a declining people is being exterminated because a large per cent of their offspring are dying in infancy and therefore do not have a chance to reproduce themselves. The physiological causes for this increase in infant mortality are suggested only tentatively, since there are no adequate medical records, and because the writer is not a physician and could make no medical investigation. However, a thorough study of the effect of introduced diseases might reveal much information on the causes for the decline of these people.[43] 161

[43] I am indebted to M. Powdermaker for making the charts accompanying this article.